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ABSTRACT

This article pertains to program development necessitated by the admission into college of those students who do not meet regular entry requirements. The author briefly describes a number of programs developed by colleges to provide remedial work, reduced academic loads, study skills instruction, and counseling for "high-risk" students. The author then presents the High-Risk Freshman Program of which she is director. The components of this program are individualized and group counseling, reading training, tutoring, art and music therapy, and special social events. The emphasis of the program is away from remediation toward individualized services. This overview of the program is concluded with an evaluation of its merits on the basis of the academic averages of the participants. (SJL)

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HIGH-RISK STUDENTS ADMITTED

TO COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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Introduction

One of the major issues in higher education today is the study of unusual, irregular open-admission, that is, the admission into college of those who do not meet regular entry requirements. Admission of these students, sometimes called "high-risk students",[1] with necessary remedial work and encouragement, has accelerated since the recognition of restricted opportunities for minority groups, economic necessity, and elimination of the draft.

Primary attention in this study is focused on the William James House High-Risk Freshman Counseling Program at Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia, directed by the author. Even though the full information is still not available, evaluative data on this program will be presented.

High-Risk Students Admitted to Colleges and Universities
Historical and Philosophical Background

Two major kinds of admission policies are present in higher education today according to Lavin, writing in the Encyclopedia of Education.[2] These are:

1. Elitist or education for a few, preparing leaders for society and maintaining high academic standards by disqualification of the educationally unfit.[3]

2. Open-Door or education for all who wish it, supporting the democratic idea of mobility among classes.[4]

Economic and social changes during the past ten years have made the open-door admission policy popular. For instance, small, private

colleges, historically selective in their admissions, have been forced to introduce unusual admissions programs to survive economically and to compete with state educational institutions. American colleges and universities have opened their doors in flexible admission policies and have instituted special low-achiever programs, thus risking criticism about low academic standards and high-rate pupil turnover.[5]

A cry for relevance in education today has also forced colleges and universities to create new, exciting, integrated programs to entice and hopefully hold the attention and loyalty of students. No longer can an educational institution long survive without constantly re-evaluating its purpose and methods, for society increasingly presses for educational change.

For example, the minority and Black Power Movement of the 1960's generated an encompassing stimulus to change the very nature of higher education institutions.[6] A prime illustration is the 1969 demonstrations at the City University of New York (CUNY) demanding, among other things, open-admission for Blacks and Puerto Ricans, special remedial programs like Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge (SEEK), and representation of minority groups on faculty and administrative committees. While specific minority demands differed at various institutions, the basic philosophy of increasing minority opportunities was consistent throughout the demonstrations.[7]

Assuming that social change sometimes affects higher education, historian Henry Steel Commager states antithetically that "education

was to be . . . the chief instrument for the regeneration of the human race,"[8] affirming faith in the ability of education to change society instead of society's only changing education. However, few will disagree that education is directed by society's needs, as is evidenced by the popularity of the open-door admission policy at a time of vigorous arguments for minority equality. For instance, democracy, according to Lavin, is supported in the invitation for all people to be educated,[9] personified by the open-door policy.

Examples of High-Risk Student Programs

I. SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge):

SEEK, a program sponsored by the City University of New York (CUNY), is the acronym for Search for Education, Elevation, and Knowledge. It was formed in 1966 and was aimed at helping the poorly prepared Negro and Puerto Rican college student within CUNY.[10]

Several units of the CUNY suffered from vandalism during the 1960's violent era. As a result of this, Brooklyn College (10,000) developed an open-admissions policy for Black and Puerto Rican students with the addition of 25 Black and 25 Puerto Rican faculty members.[11]

The 1970-71 Undergraduate Bulletin of the City College of New York describes the SEEK program as a tuition-free opportunity for high school graduates with a diploma since September, 1965, to pursue a college education.

College entrance procedure is individualized; and achievement diagnosis is made by testing reading skills, math, English, and foreign language before regular City College classes or specially designed classes are assigned to SEEK students. Special pre-baccalaureate courses combine remedial and regular college work. Individual tutoring is provided as necessary. Those students able to overcome entrance deficiencies may become baccalarueate degree candidates, but those unable to compensate for academic deficiencies are appropriately counseled.

No evaluative information regarding the success of SEEK students was collected.[12]

II. West Virginia University's High-Risk Student Program

Parker's paper on "College Dropouts. . ." mentions a particular program which West Virginia University instigated in the middle sixties to try and alleviate the tremendous dropout rate of students in that University.[13] On April 13, 1971, West Virginia University's President James G. Harlow, in a State of the University address, stated that almost one-half of the freshmen who enroll at the University leave before a two-year period is over,[14] indicating that the dropout problem at the University correlates with other universities within the nation.

An experiment was attempted in the middle 1960's at West Virginia University to reduce the dropout problem by having 330 entering underachiever, high-risk freshmen divided into four groups as follows:

Group I: Reduced academic load, counseling sessions, and study skills instruction

Group II: Normal academic load, counseling sessions, and study skills instruction

Group III: Reduced academic load

Group IV: Normal academic program[15]

Since the program is no longer in operation, an evaluation may be presented now. Results indicated that Group III did poorest academically and personally, and Group I did best: "Conclusions of the study were that a reduced course load without study skills and counseling resulted in less involvement in academic work and, therefore, less external pressure and internal motivation to succeed."[16]

III. The Educational Development Center at Berea, Ohio

Academic underachievers, or students who have ability to do college work but fail to succeed and are academically dismissed, are being aided at the Educational Development Center at Berea, Ohio. In 1964 Fred Harris, Academic Dean, and Robert Pitcher, Dean of Students of Baldwin-Wallace College, formed the Educational Development Center with Pitcher as Director in addition to his administrative duties. This Center offers diagnostic and remedial facilities and is geared to helping underachievers.[17]

In 1967, with the program scarcely two and one-half years old, the staff consisted of five fulltime members and nine part-time members. The program operates on a ten-week quarter basis with approximately 120 students completing the program annually.

Each quarter the Center serves 25 to 30 students.

The program was based for three to four years in a fourteen-room house which provided space for offices, classrooms, a language laboratory, student lounge, and study rooms. However, in 1968 the Center moved to larger quarters in a remodeled medical center, permitting greater enrollment.

The Berea Center serves students from all over the United States. According to Heller[18] the four major aspects of the Educational Development Center Program are:

1. Diagnosis
2. Remediation
3. College Placement & Counseling
4. Research About Underachievers

Eight or more hours of educational work is required from students enrolled in the program with group sessions held daily for the ten-week period. Any tardiness or noncompletion of assignments is immediately reported to an advisor. Writing and remedial reading training are conducted daily. When necessary, a psychologist will conduct a therapy session. In essence, however, the success of the Berea Program is entirely based on the student's "self-motivation, self-discipline, and self-study."[19]

An evaluation of the Berea Center's program has been made by Heller. Writing for Educational Leadership Herbert Heller reported that more than 80% of the Educational Development Center's students return to college and perform above the minimum grade level requirements. Also, according to Heller at the time of this article, a low 6% cumulative attrition rate for the program

had been tabulated.[20]

IV. The William James House High-Risk Freshman Counseling Program

The William James House High-Risk Freshman Program at Davis and Elkins College in West Virginia is a unique counseling project for low-achieving students which has received national notice.[21] Such components as individualized counseling, group counseling, reading training, tutoring, art and music therapy, and special social events compose the project. Although remediation is many times necessary, a search for psychological and physical disabilities is made to pinpoint possible reasons for poor academic achievement.[22] The program was started in the 1971-72 academic year.

The William James House was named after the father of pragmatism, and in many ways this philosophy is enforced. The creators of the project attempted to design a program of activities to meet the needs of all students enrolled in the William James House where participation is a mandatory condition for admission to the college if past academic achievement warrants this.

To provide for such a variety of approaches to the problem of low academic achievement, the William James House is operated from the College Counseling Center. It is somewhat unusual to have a program for low-achievers based only in the guidance unit of the college. Many high-risk programs elsewhere are remedially flavored or academically "watered down" to a point of weakness

after being based in the admissions office or an academic division. Many such programs are directed with emphasis on remedial reading training,[23] supplementary English courses, lightened loads, and more of the same which didn't work in the first place.[24] Remediation is not forgotten, but it is not the focal point of the program.

Individualization is present in the William James House Program from diagnosis through program design and evaluation, the three basic steps of the project. The creators of the William James House (Cassandra Bolyard Whyte, Director, and C. Joseph Martin, Director of the College Counseling Center) stressed the idea that most students seeking admission to college have the basic ability to succeed academically but have not used--or have not learned to use--this ability. Low college entrance examination scores or inadequate academic achievement in high school are the basis for enrolling freshmen in the William James House Program, along with recommendations by counselors and teachers.

The program is specifically designed to help students modify behavior, find self-awareness, confidence, good study habits and skills, and a creative approach to everyday situations. The staff consists of the Director of the William James House, the Director of the College Counseling Center, two consulting psychologists, a counseling intern, and several Junior Fellows[25] within the dormitories where the William James House students are housed together.

The William James House Program follows a format of three basic steps as mentioned before: diagnosis, program design, and evaluation.

Diagnosis

A careful analysis of previous educational records is made prior to a student's admittance to college. A weakness in academic achievement or low college entrance scores provides a basis for enrolling new students into the William James Program.

After admission to the program such tests as the Sixteen Personality Factors Test[26], Cooperative English Test, Kuder Vocational Preference Record, Strong Vocational Interest Blank, Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, Slosson Intelligence Test, Otis Quick-Scoring Mental Ability Test, and the Bender-Gestalt are available on a voluntary basis for case diagnosis.

Program Design

A program design is implemented when diagnosis is completed. Three hours a week are spent within the William James facilities, one hour a week in group counseling, and two hours a week with supervised study. During the first semester a William James freshman carries a full academic load. Hopefully, individual counseling sessions will be made quite regularly with the Director of the Program. Also, in the group counseling sessions sensitivity training, study evaluation exercises[27], tutoring, art and music therapy, and other types of group dynamics take place. Furthermore, social activities are greatly encouraged for the

William James House freshmen.[28] This is a one-semester program, and time of graduation is not extended.

There are four particular types of counseling utilized in the program: creative, individualized, interest-oriented, and general group dynamics. The theories of Rogers, Skinner, Ellis, Perls, James, Dewey, and countless others are integrated to form unique counseling procedures within the William James House.

Evaluation

The William James Program has proven itself extremely successful during its two years of operation. For instance, the 1971-72 group had a cumulative academic average of 2.40 at the end of two semesters, carrying a full load, while the entire freshman class had a cumulative average of 2.27. The range for the grades of William James students was from 3.60 to 1.50 with the mode at 2.47, median at 2.40, and the mean at 2.40. The 1971-72 group had an attrition rate of 8%. Of the 49 students enrolled in the program (41 men and 8 women), four of them (all men) left Davis and Elkins College. Two dropped out of college (both with a 2.00 or above academic average), while two transferred.

The academic average after one semester for the 1972-73 group was 2.60. At the end of one year the average for the 1972-73 group was 2.30.

Since social adjustment is an important aim of the William James House Program, it seems important to mention that the president and vice president of the 1971-72 freshman class were

from the group, and the freshman secretary and homecoming princess for 1972-73 class were from the William James House.

In conclusion, a new consciousness on the part of Americans has developed since the social protest movements of the 1960's regarding the lack of opportunities for minorities in employment, housing, and education.

Beginning on a large scale in New York City in 1969, Blacks and Puerto Ricans demanded "aided" entry into the City University of New York for which many, through no fault of their own, were unqualified. This ultimately spurred open-admissions and special admissions programs in colleges and universities which are now a part of the higher education scene and will continue to attract support, criticism, and constant evaluation.

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Footnotes

[1]High-risk students are labeled so due to low high school academic averages and for poor college entrance scores.

[2]David E. Lavin, "Selection Processes for Higher Education: Admissions Practices," The Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 8, pp. 186-87.

[3]W. B. Brookover, "Selection and Admission Policies and Practices," The College Student. (New York Center for Applied Research and Education, 1965), pp. 41-57.

[4]Lavin, "Selection Processes for Higher Education: Admissions Practices," p. 186.

[5]The City University of New York System has provided an open-door to New York City residents with a high school diploma or its equivalent since 1970.

[6]The minority power movement in the New York City Schools was a major example.

[7]Facts on File, (1969), pp. 7-9, 509E, 299E, et. al.

[8]Carol Shulman, Open Admissions in Higher Education, (ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, June, 1971). Primary Source: H. S. Commager, "Social, Political, Economic, and Personal Consequences," Universal High Education, (Ed. McGrath, New York: McGraw Hill, 1966). Carol Hernstadt Shulman has presented thesis and antithesis statements regarding the ideological quote by Commager in a publication prepared for the United States Office of Education in June, 1971, and cites a quotation, "It was the rise of meritocracy that enabled democracy to supplant elitism." The Campus and the Racial Crisis. (Ed. David C. Nichols and Olive Mills, Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1970).

[9]Lavin, "Selection Processes for Higher Education: Admissions Practices", p. 186.

[10]Catalogue of the City College of New York, Department of Special Programs. (1970-71), p. 183.

[11]The entire report on the CUNY incidents closely follows the sequence as reported in Facts on File, (1969), pp. 509E, 299E, et. al.

[12]Catalogue of the City College of New York, "Admissions", p. 11.

[13]Franklin Parker, "College Dropouts: West Virginia University and the National Scene", (mimeo, 1972), pp. 3-4.

[14]Daily Anthenaeum, (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University, April 14, 1971), p. 1.

[15]Parker, "College Dropouts: West Virginia University and the National Scene," pp. 3-4.

[16]Ibid., p. 4.

[17]Herbert Heller, "Can Underachieving College Students Be Helped?," Educational Leadership, (December, 1968), pp. 281-84.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ibid., p. 284.

[20]Ibid., p. 282.

[21]"Low Achieving Freshmen Aided," Christian Science Monitor, (May 20, 1972). C. S. Bolyard and C. J. Martin, "High-Risk Freshmen", American Measurement and Evaluation in Guidance Journal, (April, 1973). Bolyard, Duncan, Martin, Swanson, "What You See May Not Be What You Get--High-Risk Students," Program Presented to American Personnel and Guidance Association Convention, Atlanta, Georgia, May, 1973.

[22]Donald Dinkmeyer, Child Development, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), p. 208. According to Dinkmeyer, the key to low-achievement in school may be a continuous development of a poor self-concept which has never been reversed over the years--a combination of home and school experiences.

[23]Cassandra S. Bolyard, "Games Readers Play," Interchange, The Reading Teacher, Journal of the International Reading Association, (Vol. 26, No. 5, 1973) p. 500. Special reading activities are incorporated into the regular remedial program.

[24]Franklin Parker, "College Dropouts: West Virginia University and the National Scene--Some Questions Considered," p. 4.

[25]Junior Fellows are upperclass student counselors who are given free room and board in return for counseling services. Special training is available for these student counselors in reference to referrals and other counseling situations.

[26]A study showed that high-risk freshmen do not have significant personality traits. (Fall, 1972, William James House)

[27]Cassandra Bolyard, "Textbooks", Crossfire, The Reading Teacher, Journal of the International Reading Association, (November, 1972), p. 195. Educational methods are also considered.

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